

checked this fact when I came in. But we were the third poorest State. So we kept our taxes low, but we also had to enact some other pro-growth policies, which included getting rid of a usury limit, preserving the right to work law, reducing the number of employees in government, but it also included building highways. Eventually, I came to the conclusion that the single most important thing we could do to improve family incomes in our State was to focus on improving the quality of schools, colleges, universities, and research, so we began to pay teachers more for teaching well. We created chairs of excellence at the universities and centers of excellence at the universities. I believe that partly because of all those things together, our State began to increase its family incomes at a rate that was faster than any other part of our—any other State in the country during the 1980s. It was no coincidence we were also increasing funding for our education during that time at a rate faster than any other State.

So an important part of a pro-growth plan—a Republican pro-growth plan, but obviously many Democrats agree with this as well—is fully funding the America COMPETES Act, making sure we keep our brainpower advantage so we can keep our jobs.

I congratulate the Senator from New Mexico, Mr. BINGAMAN, for his leadership on this, and the senior Senator from New Mexico, Mr. DOMENICI, for his leadership on this. I thank the majority leader and the Republican leader for their co-sponsorship of this act.

I say to Senators CONRAD and GREGG, I am glad you made room in the budget for much of the America COMPETES Act. I hope we can complete the job with the Bingaman amendment so we can keep those jobs from going overseas. That is one good way to help advance a pro-growth plan that will help balance the family budget.

I thank the President, and I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Massachusetts is recognized.

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, I welcome the fact that at the real start of this debate on the Budget Act, we have an amendment that reflects the best judgment of Republicans and Democrats alike in the Senate, which is so key to the future of our country, and to listen to our colleagues on both sides of the aisle at a time when, on so many issues, there is divisiveness, but on this issue, there is a real coming together in the Senate on this item for the support of the America COMPETES Act.

I wish to commend those who have been a part of this process over recent years. It has been truly a bipartisan effort. We have listened to Senator BINGAMAN, Senator ALEXANDER, and others who have been a part of this whole process, and it was an enormous achievement this last year when the bill passed the Senate. Now, we are im-

pressed by the fact that those who were involved in making sure this was going to be achieved are committed to making sure we are going to have muscle and bones on this project in the form of providing the resources which are necessary to make it effective. This is, I think, one of the most important undertakings we will have in this debate and discussion on the budget, and I am very hopeful we will get a strong vote in support of this amendment.

Very briefly, I think all of us understand the average family in this country is exceedingly hard-pressed at this time. They are wondering whether they are going to be able to pay their mortgages, and we are finding out that many are unable to pay their mortgages and they are losing their homes, or they have the threat of losing their homes. It is difficult to imagine, I think, for many of us, when parents go to bed at night and wonder whether they are going to be able to afford their mortgages and maintain their home for themselves, their families, and for their children, but it is happening in too many parts of this country. At the same time, those same parents are wondering if they are going to be able to heat their homes, at least in my part of the country. With the fact of the extraordinary explosion of the cost of home heating oil, we find so many families are hard-pressed to be able to provide heating for their homes.

These are families who have worked hard, who have played by the rules all their lives, and they are wondering now about what the future will hold for themselves and for their parents and for their children. Are they going to be able to make sure their parents are going to be able to live their golden years in peace and dignity? They are hard-pressed to provide the extra help and assistance to them so they can afford their prescription drugs. They have seen the cost of tuition go up and continue to go up, and they wonder if they will be able to educate their children; while fuel and gas go up, whether they will be able to fill the gas tank to get to their jobs where they are working. There is enormous anxiety. There is also the concern about rising health care costs. There is enormous rising anxiety out in the country. People are wondering: Why should my job be at risk? I have worked hard. I have played by the rules. I have done everything I possibly can, and still I wonder whether in a few years, the opportunities for my children are going to be as great as opportunities were for me. I know my parents sacrificed so I would be able to make progress, and now I wonder whether my children are going to be better off than I was. That is going on in home after home across this country.

It is as a result of the failure of economic policy. It is a failure of fiscal and monetary policy over the period of recent years. It is not the fault of these particular families; it is the fault of economic policy and giving the kinds

of investments in our country and investments in individuals that are necessary in order to have a strong economy. We know how to do it. We have seen it done. I am not going to take the time of the Senate to go back over the history where it has been done and it should be done.

So we are faced with where we are today, and this calls for immediate assistance for these families. We have seen the efforts that have been made in terms of housing and in terms of the unemployment, the help and assistance of fuel assistance and food stamps and others to try to address the immediate kinds of problems families are facing.

We also have to look at where we are going to be as a country in terms of the future, where we are going to be in 3 to 5 years as we are seeing this whole global economy challenge the United States. One overarching fact is that the future is going to be the knowledge economy, the economy that puts the premise on knowledge and information and education. That is where the future is going to lie. That will be the great competition between the countries of Asia and the United States. We are thinking about how we are going to address that, and the COMPETES Act is one of the important solutions to this challenge.

Mr. President, if we look at this chart here, it is interesting in terms of U.S. students. To be globally competitive, we need to tackle the achievement gaps. U.S. students from high-income families outperform students in other countries in math, while U.S. students from low-income families lag behind. When you are talking about international competitiveness, we find that U.S. students who come from higher income families are able to go to schools that are able to afford the good teachers, are able to out-compete the students in other parts of the world. It is no mystery about how that should be done. But students who come from lower income families are not able to keep pace. This legislation is designed to, among other things, reduce this gap that exists now in our country.

Look at this chart. We have more math classes in high-poverty schools that are taught by teachers without a major in that subject. You have low-poverty secondary schools where the percentage of secondary school math classes taught by teachers without that major is 26 percent. In the high-poverty schools, it is 56 percent. Much of it comes down to teachers and the importance of investing in them, to make sure they are going to have the skills to serve in communities and in school districts all over the country, and so they are going to have the competency. If you are not going to have the high-quality teachers in underserved areas, then you are going to have those kinds of results we saw with the other chart where American children are going to fall further and further behind. It is in this very area that the COMPETES Act is directed.